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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
09/853,259	05/11/2001	Andrew Tibbs	18360/206856	5032

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ALSTON & BIRD LLP
BANK OF AMERICA PLAZA
101 SOUTH TRYON STREET, SUITE 4000
CHARLOTTE, NC 28280-4000

EXAMINER

COSIMANO, EDWARD R

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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3629

DATE MAILED: 02/08/2005

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

09/853,259

Applicant(s)

TIBBS ET AL.

Examiner

Edward R. Cosimano

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-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --
Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If the period for reply specified above is less than thirty (30) days, a reply within the statutory minimum of thirty (30) days will be considered timely.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 17 May 2001.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-20 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) none is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-20 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).
- * See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- 1) ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☒ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449 or PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date 9/23/02.
- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____.
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152)
- 6) ☐ Other: _____.

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1. Applicant should note the changes to patent practice and procedure:
 - A) effective December 01, 1997 as published in the Federal Register, Vol 62, No. 197, Friday October 10, 1997;
 - B) effective November 07, 2000 as published in the Federal Register, Vol 65, No. 54603, September 08, 2000; and
 - C) Amendment in revised format, Vol. 1267 of the Official Gazette published February 25, 2003.
2. Applicant's claim for the benefit of an earlier filing data under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) and 35 U.S.C. § 120 is acknowledged.
3. The specification and drawings have not been checked to the extent necessary to determine the presence of all possible minor errors. Applicant's cooperation is requested in correcting any errors of which applicant may become aware in the specification or drawings. Applicant should note the requirements of 37 CFR § 1.52, 37 CFR § 1.74, § 1.75, § 1.84(o,p(5)), § 1.121(a)-1.121(f) & § 1.121(h)-1.121(i).
4. Claims 1-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention.
 - 4.1 In regard to claims 1-20, although one of ordinary skill at the time of the invention would know how to accomplish each of the individual recited actions/functions from the language of these claims, since, there is no clear and definite interconnection between one or more of the recited limitations of these claims, one of ordinary skill could not determine from the language of these claims whether or not they are in fact making and/or using the claimed invention. In this regard it is noted that from the language of these claims it is vague, indefinite and unclear:
 - A) in regard to claims 1 & 12, and from where is the "shipping information related to said return" obtained, since the invention as recited in these claims does not require the obtained shipping information to be the correct information necessary to make the return.

B) in regard to claims 1 & 12, and how is the electronically provided “return shipping label” used, since the invention as recited in these claims does not require the electronic label to be physically printed or for the label to be physically placed on the package or for the package with the return label to be placed with a carrier for delivery to its destination.

C) in regard to claim 1, and what information appears on the electronically provided “return shipping label” used, since the invention as recited in this claim does not require that the obtained shipping information be used to generate the electronic label.

D) in regard to claims 5 & 15, and how the “customer order database” is accessed to obtain the “shipping information”, since the invention as recited in these claims does not set forth, or receive as an input any information that would reasonably identify either a customer or an order so that the “customer order database” would provide the correct shipping information.

E) in regard to claim 16, and how and why the “product database” is accessed to obtain the “shipping information”, since the invention as recited in this claim does not set forth, or receive as an input any information that would reasonably identify either a customer or a product so that the “product database” would provide the correct shipping information.

F) in regard to claim 20 and how the “application server” can generate a “return shipping label based at least in part on shipping information received from the merchant server”, since the invention as recited in this claim does not set forth, or receive as an input any information that would reasonably identify either a customer or a product or an order that would either:

(1) cause the “merchant server” send any “shipping information” to the “application server”; or

(2) indicate that a customer wishes to return any one or more products from one or more of the customer’s orders, so that the correct customer may receive the generated shipping label; or

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(3) indicate which customer wishes to return any one or more products from one or more of the customer's orders, so that the correct shipping address would be sent from the "merchant server" to the "application server" and then used when generating the shipping return label; or

(4) indicate which one or more "products" are to be returned so that the correct product related shipping information would be sent from the "merchant server" to the "application server" and then used when generating the shipping label.

G) in regard to claim 20 and how the "customer computer" can receive the "return shipping label", since the invention as recited in this claim does not set forth that the "merchant server" in fact sends any information to the "application server, so that the "application server" would generate the "return shipping label" or that the "application server" would in fact send the "generated return shipping label" to the customer so that the customer may receive the "return shipping label".

4.2 Claims not specifically mentioned above, inherit the defects of the base claim through dependency. For the above reason(s), applicant has failed to particularly point out what is regarded as the invention.

5. 35 U.S.C. § 101 reads as follows:

"Whoever invents or discovers any new and useful process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter or any new and useful improvement thereof, may obtain a patent therefore, subject to the conditions and requirements of this title".

5.1 Claims 1-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 101 because the invention as claimed is directed to non-statutory subject matter.

5.1.1 The instant claims recite a system, (claim 20), and a method comprising a series of steps to be performed, (claims 1-19), which have a disclosed practical application in the technological or useful arts. Further, the instant claims do not merely define either a computer program, a data structure, non-functional descriptive material, (i.e. mere data) or a natural phenomenon.

5.1.2 In regard to claims 1-20, the invention as set forth in these claims merely describes:

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A) in regard to claims 1-11, a method comprising the functions/acts of requesting a return of goods, obtaining information and providing the electronic return label to the customer as an electronic return label.

B) in regard to claims 12-19, a method comprising the functions/acts of requesting a return of goods, obtaining information; providing the obtained information to a service provider and the service provider generates the electronic return label and provides the customer with access to the electronic return label.

C) in regard to claim 20 a client/server network system that provides the functions/acts of generating a return shipping label from received information and providing the return shipping label to the customer's computer.

However, the process/system as recited in these claims does not require the result of either the claim as a whole or the manipulations of data as recited in these claims be applied in any manner so as to be tangibly used in a concrete manner and hence to produce a useful concrete and tangible result, that is a concrete and tangible application with in the technological or useful arts.

5.1.3 It is further noted that applicant has not recited in these claims a specific process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter, or any new and useful improvement thereof, which is either:

A) altered or changed or modified by the invention recited in claims; or

B) utilizes the result of the invention recited in these claims; or

C) is operated or controlled by the result of the invention recited in these claims.

5.1.4 It is further noted in regard to claims 1-20, that as claimed applicant has not claimed:

A) pre computer processing, since the claims fail to recited that the data, which originates from an unknown source, is manipulated or transformed/changed before it is processed by the claimed invention; or

B) post computer processing, since the claims fail to recited that the data which represents the result of the claimed manipulation, is neither manipulated nor used nor changed by any device after it has been processed by the claimed invention; or

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C) a practical use of the claimed invention by any physical system or device or method outside of the claimed invention other than a statement of the intended use of the claimed invention; or

D) process steps or physical acts/operations by the claimed invention that would affect the internal operation of a computer/machine as were found to be statutory in either In re McIlroy 170 USPQ 31 (CCPA, 1971) or In re Waldbaum 173 USPQ 430 (CCPA, 1972); or

E) process steps or physical acts/operations by the claimed invention that would be considered as going beyond the manipulation of “abstract ideas” as were found to be non-statutory in In re Warmerdam 31 USPQ2d 1754 (CAFC, 1994); or

F) a concrete and tangible practical application of either:

(1) the invention as a whole; or

(2) the final results of the manipulations/actions with in the technological or useful arts;

note In re Sarkar 200 USPQ 132 (CCPA, 1978) where the process step of “constructing said obstruction within the actual open channel at the specified adjusted location indicated by the mathematical model” was held to be so tenuous connected to the remaining process steps as to not be a process with in the scope of 35 U.S.C. § 101.

Hence, the invention of claims 1-20 is merely directed to an hypothetical mental exercise that manipulates an abstract idea of using received/obtained information to generate electronic label that the fail to required to be used for the intended purpose of returning one or more products and hence is with out a claimed concrete and tangible practical application of the abstract idea, (note In re Beauregard 35 USPQ2d 1383 (CAFC 1995) and the associated claims of U.S. Patent 5,710,578; and State Street Bank & Trust Co. v. Signature Financial Group Inc. 47 USPQ2d 1596 (CAFC 1998)).

5.1.5 It is further noted that the type/nature of either the data or the calculated numbers does not affect the operation of the claimed invention and hence are considered to be non function descriptive material, (note In re Gulack, 703 F.2d 1381, 1385, 217 USPQ 401, 404 (Fed. Cir. 1983)).

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5.1.6 In practical terms, claims define nonstatutory processes if they:

A) consist solely of mathematical operations without some claimed practical application (i.e., executing a “mathematical algorithm”); or

B) simply manipulate abstract ideas, e.g., a bid (Schrader, 22 F.3d at 293-94, 30 USPQ2d at 1458-59) or a bubble hierarchy (Warmerdam, 33 F.3d at 1360, 31 USPQ2d at 1759),

without some claimed practical application of the mathematics or abstract idea.

5.1.7 In view of the above analysis claims 1-20 as a whole, are directed to an hypothetical mental exercise that merely manipulates mathematics or an abstract idea without a claimed concrete and tangible practical application of the mathematics or abstract idea, and hence are directed to non-statutory subject matter.

5.2 Claims 1-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 101 because the invention as claimed is directed to non-statutory subject matter.

5.2.1 As set forth by the Court in:

A) In re Musgrave 167 USPQ 280 at 289-290 (CCPA 1970), “We cannot agree with the Board that these claims (all the steps of which can be carried out by the disclosed apparatus) are directed to non-statutory processes merely because some or all of the steps therein can also be carried out in or with the aid of the human mind or because it may be necessary for one performing the process to think. All that is necessary, in our view, to make a sequence of operational steps a statutory “process” within 35 U.S.C. 101 is that it be in the technological arts so as to be in consonance with the Constitutional purpose to promote the progress of “useful arts.” Cons. Art. 1, sec. 8.”, {emphasis added}; and

B) In re Sarkar 100 USPQ 132 @ 136-137 (CCPA 1978), echoing the Board of Appeals stated in regard to claim 14 “14. A method of locating an obstruction in an open channel to affect flow in a predetermined manner comprising:

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a) obtaining the dimensions of said obstruction which affect the parameters of flow;

b) constructing a mathematical model of at least that portion of the open channel in which said obstruction is to be located in accordance with the method of claim 1 using those dimensions obtained in step (a) above;

c) adjusting the location of said obstruction within said mathematical model until the desired effect upon flow is obtained in said model; and thereafter

d) constructing said obstruction within the actual open channel at the specified adjusted location indicated by the mathematical model.”;

and “Concerning claims 14-39 and the significance of "post-solution activity," like building a bridge or dam, the board concluded: While it is true that the final step in each of these claims makes reference to the mathematical result achieved by performing the prior recited steps, we consider the connection to be so tenuous that the several steps recited in each claim when considered as a whole do not constitute a proper method under the statute.”, {emphasis added}.

5.2.2 Further, it is noted in regard to claims 14-39 of Sarkar, although step (d) of claim 14 of Sarkar references the result of step (c) of claim 14 of Sarkar it is clear from the language of step (c) of claim 14 of Sarkar that multiple adjustments to the location of the obstruction are required to be made until a location with the desired effect has been determined. Hence, the reference to constructing the obstruction at the “specified adjusted location” in step (d) of claim 14 of Sarkar is vague, indefinite and unclear in regard to which one of the possible multiple adjusted locations of the obstruction that were used during step (c) of claim 14 of Sarkar would be used when constructing the obstruction as required by step (d) of Sarkar. Therefore, without a clear connection between step (d) of Sarkar and the remaining steps of claim 14 of Sarkar, the Board of Appeals and the Court held that these claims were not a process within the meaning of process as used in 35 U.S.C. § 101 and hence were directed to non statutory subject matter.

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5.2.3 As can be seen from claims 1-20, these claims are directed to a series of devices for performing various functions or steps/actions/functions, which as set forth above in regard to the rejection of claims 1-20 under 35 U.S.C. § 112 2nd paragraph, are not clearly and definitely interconnected to one another and therefore do not provide an operative useful machine/system or method/process with in the meaning of machine or process as used in 35 U.S.C. § 101.

5.3 Claims 1-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 101 because the invention as claimed is directed to non-statutory subject matter, since:

A) in regard to claims 1-20, these claims fail to comply with the “requirements this title, namely 35 U.S.C. § 112 2nd paragraph as set forth above.

B) in regard to claims 1-20, these claims fail to comply with the “requirements this title, namely 35 U.S.C. § 102 as set forth below.

6. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. § 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless --

(e) the invention was described in (1) an application for patent, published under section 122(b), by another filed in the United States before the invention by the applicant for patent or (2) a patent granted on an application for patent by another filed in the United States before the invention by the applicant for patent, except that an international application filed under the treaty defined in section 351(a) shall have the effects for purposes of this subsection of an application filed in the United States only if the international application designated the United States and was published under Article 21(2) of such treaty in the English language.

6.1 Claims 1-20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being clearly anticipated by Williams et al (2002/0032612).

6.1.1 In regard to claims 1-20, Williams et al ('612) discloses an computer implemented internet based shipping management system/method, which under the control of a operating program stored in memory receives a customer's request to return an item that has been ordered, purchased and sent to the customer. To this end the system/method of Williams et al ('612) either directly or indirectly receives through the merchant's web site and the merchant's

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server a request from a customer at a remote client computer to return an item that the customer has purchased from the merchant. Based on the customer's request, the necessary shipping information is obtained and with the approval of the merchant an electronic version of a return shipping label is created. The customer is then permitted to access the electronic return label as a html document over the internet so that the customer may physically print the return label and then use the printed label to return the purchased item.

7. The examiner has cited prior art of interest, for example:

A) Rotermund (5,520,990) which disclose that at the time the shipping order is generated for a shipment that is being sent from the merchant to the customer, a return label is generated for use by the customer when the customer is to return the shipment back to the merchant.

B) Miller (6,244,763) which discloses an internet based postage system in which an user may generated both the shipping label for sending a package to the recipient and a return label for recipient to use when returning the package/shipment back to the original sender.

C) either Sansone et al (EP 1209589 or 6,547,136 or 6,714,922) disclose an consumer at a remote computer generating a return label with postage that has been paid by the merchant.

8. The shorten statutory period of response is set to expire 3 (three) months from the mailing date of this Office action.

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9. Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Edward Cosimano whose telephone number is (703) 305-9783. The examiner can normally be reached Monday through Thursday from 7:30am to 6:00pm. If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, John Weiss, can be reached on (703)-308-2702. Any inquiry of a general nature or relating to the status of this application should be directed to the Group receptionist whose telephone number is (703) 308-1113.

9.1 The fax phone number for UNOFFICIAL/DRAFT FAXES is (703) 746-7240.

9.2 The fax phone number for OFFICIAL FAXES is (703) 872-9306.

9.3 The fax phone number for AFTER FINAL FAXES is (703) 872-9306.

02/06/05



Edward R. Cosimano

Primary Examiner A.U. 3629